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8 December 1978

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The Soviets may have used the recent visit to Moscow of a Seychelles military delegation to push for some form of a military relationship, but President Rene continues to reaffirm his nonaligned policies. (C)

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Seychelles: Military Delegation to the USSR (C)

President Rene, in an apparent effort to buttress his nonaligned credentials, finally accepted a Soviet invitation and sent a top-level Seychelles delegation--headed by Minister of Internal Affairs Ogilvy Berlouis--to the Soviet Union in early November. Although Rene leans to the left, he has maintained relatively close ties with the West since coming to power in 1977. Moscow almost certainly regarded the delegation's visit as a breakthrough in its relations with this Indian Ocean country and may have offered Rene a small quantity of military equipment. Rene is specifically seeking a new radar system for his country's international airport, but will probably also accept some Soviet military equipment to assuage the concern of some cabinet members over their nation's security. He probably does not regard the acceptance of this material as a potential threat to his country's sovereignty. The Soviets will undoubtedly use this opening to cultivate the Seychellois, especially those who may become Rene's successors, and try to reduce Seychellois apprehension about allowing Soviet naval port visits. (C)

Soviet Perseverance

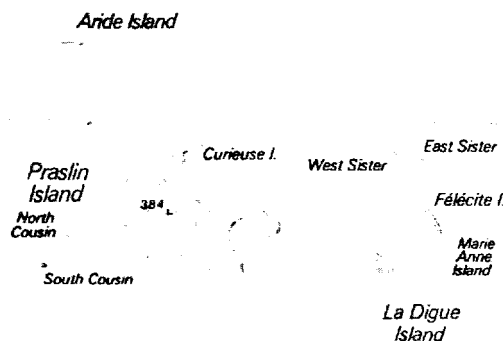
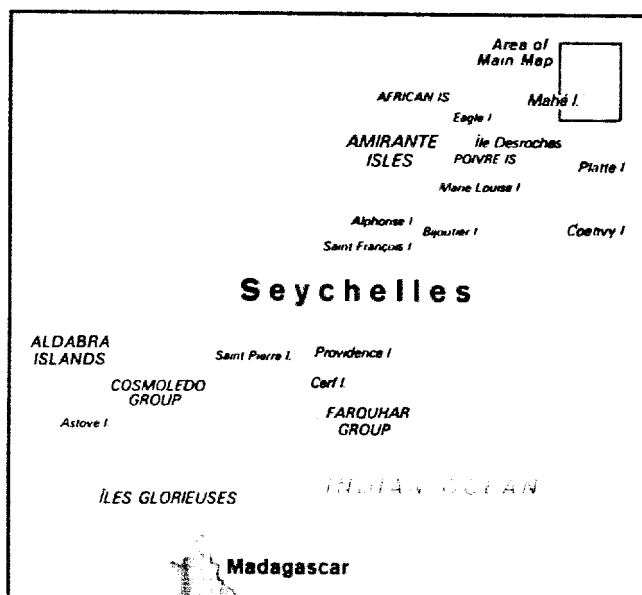
The Soviets have suffered numerous setbacks in their attempt to increase their influence in this strategically located Indian Ocean island. They were not deflected by Rene's rebuffs in the past, and probably see the visit by Seychelles military leaders as a significant success. While in Moscow, the military delegation--which involved many young and inexperienced officers--was very likely given a slanted view of the presence of the US tracking station on the island of Mahe and of the program that gives landing rights to US reconnaissance aircraft. (C)

Since the beginning of negotiations on a joint fisheries venture last June, Moscow has consistently reiterated its desire to provide military assistance to the Seychelles and has continually pressured Rene to accept this offer. Rene has also received considerable pressure from cabinet members who believe former President

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Seychelles



North I.

Silhouette I.

Marie Made Island

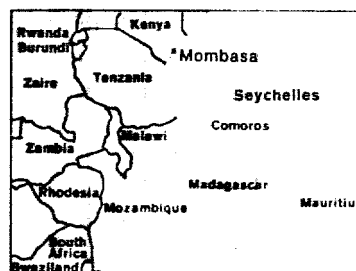


Recif I.

Frigate I.

L'îlot

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James Mancham, deposed by Rene in 1977, may be preparing to mount a mercenary invasion to regain control in the Seychelles. Rene also shares these security concerns. (C)

Rene's Response

Rene continues to reaffirm his policy of nonalignment and is apparently determined not to succumb to Soviet blandishments. Moscow, realizing that Rene and his government are concerned about their security but that they lack the capital to purchase any military equipment, probably is prepared to provide the Seychelles with small amounts of military aid. The Soviets may, however, also try to obtain some form of military access to the Seychelles in exchange for such aid. Rene, who has forbidden Soviet military ships to anchor in the Seychelles, is unlikely to agree to such an arrangement. (C)

Rene's cabinet, moreover, apparently supports the President's nonaligned policy and has unanimously agreed that Soviet military advisers will not be welcome in the Seychelles. Seychellois will instead be trained in Tanzania and other Third World countries in the use of any equipment provided by the Soviets. (C)

Despite Rene's apparent confidence in his ability to keep the Soviets at arm's length, the possibility of a military relationship--however limited--has had an unnerving effect on the normally placid Seychellois. Minister of Development and Planning Ferrari, for example, believes that Moscow may no longer feel the need to respect his country's sovereignty. His concern and those of other officials were probably sharpened by the two unauthorized dockings of Soviet ships last October. Rene's government was inclined to view the first of these landings as a harmless mistake. The second docking, however, occurred on the strategically important island of Aldabra*--and was generally regarded by the Seychellois as a reflection of Moscow's disdain for Seychelles sovereignty. (C) (CONFIDENTIAL)

*Aldabra has a good deep-water harbor and it is situated half-way between Mombasa, Kenya, and the US military station on the island of Diego Garcia.

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